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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000713

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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (04/24): ABBAS DEMANDS THAT USG
TAKE "FIRM STAND" IN NEGOTIATIONS

Main Stories:

All the Palestinian dailies carried prominent and extensive coverage of President Abbas's meetings in Washington on their front pages. In a front-page article appearing under a large photo of Abbas meeting with Secretary Rice, Abbas was quoted as saying "the gap between the Palestinian and the Israeli stands is still wide. We demand that the American administration take a firm stand to make 2008 a year of peace." The dailies highlighted that Abbas will be meeting with President Bush today, April 24, and Al-Ayyam also reported that according to Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, Secretary Rice will visit the region at the beginning of next month.

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Related reports on the front pages of all the dailies focused on discussions between the King of Jordan and President Bush regarding the peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Comments made by deposed Hamas PM Isma'il Haniyeh on April 23 received front page coverage in all dailies, where he was reported as saying that Hamas will only agree to a ceasefire with Israel if it is bilateral, adding that "the ball is in Israel's court." In contrast, related coverage on the front page of Al-Quds quoted Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad al-Malki as saying "a ceasefire in Gaza will be declared very soon. We are very close to calling a truce that will end the rocket fire on Israel, the Israeli strikes and the Gaza siege." Al-Quds also reported on Egyptian negotiations with Israel about resuming fuel deliveries for the Gaza Strip's power plant and quoted an Egyptian official as saying "we succeeded in convincing Israel to resume supplying gasoline to the power plant

[note: which Israel has done], after reports said the plant would be shut down due to lack of fuel." The dailies reported that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) halted its food distribution program in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, and would not resume the program until Israel supplied fuel to the Gaza Strip.

The dailies continue to carry reports on the visit of former US President Carter. The front page of Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reported that "Carter accused Rice of lying, denying that the State Department had asked him to refrain from meeting with Hamas." Al-Quds reported that Carter's office issued a press release summarizing his tour in the Middle East.

On the Syrian peace path, the leading story in Al-Quds reported that Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan informed Damascus that the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, agreed to withdraw from the occupied Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria. This claim reportedly caused uproar among several members of the Israeli Knesset.

Inside pages of Al-Quds and Al-Ayyam carried coverage about the visit of Public Affairs Officer Micaela Schweitzer-Bluhm to Miftah, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy. Al-Ayyam carried a photo of the meeting and reported that Ms. Schweitzer-Bluhm gave a very useful and comprehensive lecture on the "race to the White House". Related coverage on the front page of Al-Quds reported on the ongoing elections campaign in the US.

Wafa News Agency carried a very positive and lengthy article on the briefing conducted by Howard Sumka, director of USAID for the West bank and Gaza, with the local press in Ramallah on April 23. The report included coverage of projects implemented by USAID in the Palestinian Territories.

BLOCK QUOTES:

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Main Stories:

11. Independent Al-Ayyam carries an op-ed by regular columnist Talal Okal entitled "There is only one way out" (4/24): "The outcome of the visit of former US president [Carter] does not deserve the media uproar that it created regarding its possible effects and consequences ... Carter asked Hamas to recognize Israel, denounce violence and terrorism, and show commitment to all treaties signed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization. He also asked Hamas to initiate a truce and to accept Israel's conditions regarding the release of Israeli soldier Shalit. Hamas' announcement that it will accept the outcome of a Palestinian public referendum on any agreement reached through negotiations between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel was conditioned on first achieving internal Palestinian reconciliation, which we all know will be hard to achieve. In the midst of all this, the big question in the minds of the Palestinian people regards the future of the situation, especially if Hamas continues to oppose the PA, since this can head towards an explosion that no one will be able to predict the limits of..."

12. Independent Al-Ayyam carries an op-ed by regular columnist, Dr. Abd Al-Majeed Swailm entitled "The visit of President Abu Mazen to Washington" (4/24): "It had been said that the visit of our president to the United States came after an American request, and is not part of the regular pilgrimage that the leaders of this region make to Washington whenever it is close to the time of any US president to leave the White House. It also been said that President Bush wants to hear directly from President Abbas on what had been achieved in ongoing negotiations with the Israel, so that Bush can have an achievement or breakthrough to talk about and present to the Republican Party ... in short, the United States wants to sell us words, promises, dreams, wishes, and imaginations for a new vision or an old vision which might be implemented or postponed..."

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